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THE SEA OF GALILEE.

By the REVEREND A. K. PARKER, D.D.,
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THE first sight of that little oval sheet of water deep sunk among the Galilean hills, upon whose shore nineteen hundred years ago light sprung up for a people which sat in the region and shadow of death, is hardly second in heart-moving interest to that of Jerusalem itself. Approaching it by the route commonly traveled today one comes suddenly upon the Sea of Galilee from the summit of the hill above Tiberias. The ascent of this hill from the west is gradual and easy, but it falls away abruptly in its eastern slope.

None of the adjectives commonly employed in the description of landscape fits the extraordinary scene which here greets the eye. It is neither wild nor grand nor picturesque nor dreary. It is extravagant to compare it as one writer has done with the "glowing beauty" of the Lake of Geneva. Nor on the other hand could it be thought commonplace and dull, even if it were quite divested of its sacred associations. It is entirely wanting, no doubt, in the "refinement and elegance" of the Italian lakes, and in the noble austerity of Loch Lomond; but Gennesaret has a beauty of its own nevertheless. From the point of view upon which we are standing it can be seen from end to end of its thirteen miles and the clearness of the atmosphere brings its eastern shore so near that it appears to be hardly more than two miles wide instead of six. Its surface is very still and very blue. A white ribbon of sandy beach defines its western and northern shore. Yonder the inlet of the muddy Jordan is concealed in flowery green thickets and Hermon lifts his snowy head above the foldings of the mountain range. Just below us melancholy Tiberias crouches within her shattered walls. The banks of the unfrequented eastern shore rise steeply from the water to a level table-land clothed in a soft green coloring, broken with darker



GENERAL VIEW OF THE SEA OF GALILEE.



RUINS OF TIBERIAS.

hues where the shadows of lazy clouds are slowly creeping. The lake itself and its shores, as far as the eye can reach, lie quiet, as though under the spell of an enchanter's wand. There are cultivated fields about us, but nowhere a laborer. No hum of life reaches us from the city below, no sound of bell or echo of voices. Not even a thread of smoke rises from it to stain the clear air.

Zigzagging slowly down the steep descent we ride into the forlorn little town. Tiberias is packed in between the base of the hills and the lake, surrounded once by thick walls, which are rent and yawning now with the great gaps made by an earthquake more than fifty years ago. One wonders whether even that earthquake shock awoke the drowsy city. She huddles still within her shattered fortifications as fearfully as in the days when sentinels upon her towers watched for the spears of armed men to glitter and bristle upon the hilltop, and warders swung and barred her heavy gates at sunset.

Cleanliness is as remote as possible from godliness in the Orient. Dilapidated and filthy Tiberias shares with Jerusalem and Safed the glory of being esteemed by orthodox Jews a "holy city." Its entire Jewish population reckoned by the guess, which is the most trustworthy census known in lands the Sultan rules, numbers perhaps fifteen hundred, and very many of them are in fact paupers supported by a charitable fund to which pious Israelites all over the world contribute that they may enable their brethren to devote themselves to sloth and prayer. It is "a good work" to consent to live in holy Tiberias, and to die there is an act of extraordinary merit.

We loitered a half-hour in the mean little bazaar of Tiberias surveyed the while by a throng of townspeople which may have been made up, for aught we knew, of saints, surrendered to the higher life of devout contemplation. One would not wittingly do them an injustice, but there was a malignant gleam in the eyes of some of these devout and dirty old men which justified the doubt whether they were accustomed to include Christians in the supplications and intercessions which it is the serious occupation of their lives to offer. Mounting the horses

again we clattered out of the narrow mud-walled streets leaving unvisited the ruined castle, the decaying mosque, the Latin convent with its one remaining monk, even the Protestant Mission establishment just outside the walls, in haste for the refreshment of the camp whose white tents were already rising up on the shore of the lake to the south. What guidebook sight-seeing could rival the claim of this lonely, charmed shore at sunset, with tiny waves lapping and rustling on the white sand, and the delicate green of the eastern heights opposite changing in the evening light into exquisite tints of rose and pearl?

We came out at the breakfast call the next morning to find a sailboat drawn up upon the beach near the camp and a party of wild-eyed, turbaned men, wrapped in shapeless woolen cloaks to protect them from the driving storm, squabbling with the steward over the sale of a bucket of fish. Did such clamor rend the air when those other fishermen of Galilee whose names are household words offered the spoils of their nets in the market place of Bethsaida in Capernaum? The lake was still gray and forbidding seen through streets of rain when a half-hour later our bare-legged rowers pushed us off; but it was not long before the clouds broke, the sun shone out and the sail was raised. With a northward course and hugging the shore we came in an hour or two to a tiny inlet. Here the short voyage ends. We are landing at Tell Hum, the traditional site of Capernaum.

One sees at Tell Hum what he can, not what he would, namely, a wide, open field with hills rising about it thickly overgrown with thistles and rank weeds. Scattered everywhere over this field, and almost hidden from view by the growth of vegetation are the fragments of ancient buildings, some of limestone or marble, weatherworn and gray, the larger number of black basalt. Upon one here and there is faintly discernible traces of decorative carving. Without exception these stones are insignificant in size, and half seen among the tall weeds they tell nothing of the shape or dimensions of the buildings of which they once formed a part. The ruins of the synagogue of which so much has been written were pointed out. Otherwise they would hardly have attracted attention. Laurence Oliphant visiting this spot five

years earlier wrote to a New York newspaper, "It is a matter of surprise to me that neither the Greek nor the Roman Catholic Church in their zeal to discover holy places have yet thought of occupying this one." Unhappily that neglect has been repaired. A misdirected zeal, whether for religion or for reverence, after having built its church at Cana, has invaded the solitude of Tell Hum. We saw with regret that the field of ruins was inclosed



TELL HUM.

with a substantial wall, and that stonecutters and masons were busy in the building of a church. Already no doubt the gaudy altar has been set up, the candles lighted, the masses said, and pilgrims' pence are enriching the treasury.

This is Tell Hum as we saw it. Nothing could well have been more disappointing. The hardest-headed man in the company breathed his sigh over another illusion faded into air. We plodded about among the weeds and stones goading the reluctant imagination to reconstruct the vanished city. Futile endeavor! The

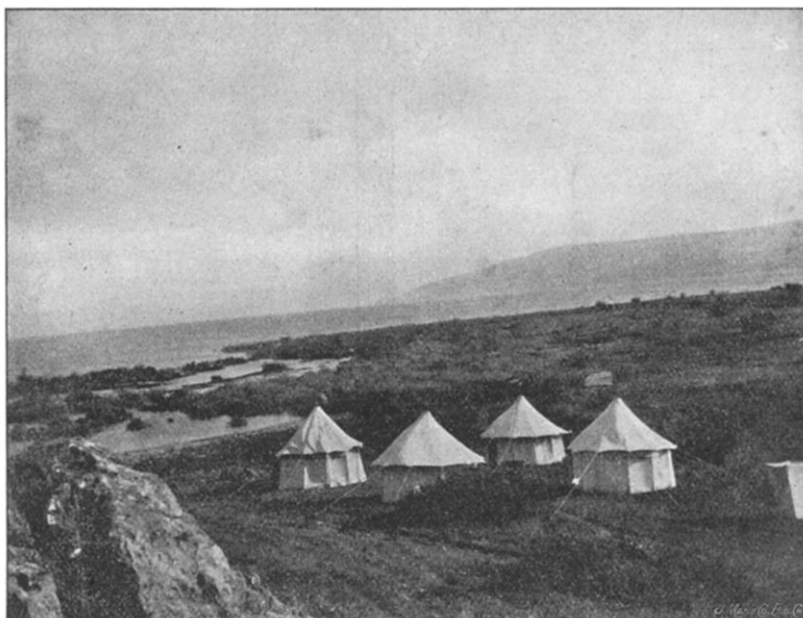
past would not return at the summons of this spectacle of desolation. How is it possible that a proud and populous city could have been swept away so completely? Might time have spared us but an archway, a column, a bit of pavement, how grateful would have been the gift! "And thou Capernaum, shalt thou be exalted unto heaven? Thou shalt be brought down to Hades!"



PILGRIMS' CHURCH AT CANA.

But is Tell Hum in fact the site of ancient Capernaum? Its pretensions are disputed, as everyone knows by the fertile and well-watered plain of Gennesaret, stretching three miles along the shore, and running back inland a mile or more to the base of the receding mountains. Gennesaret does not rest its claim upon its ruins, though it has a series of low mounds to show, which are plainly artificial, but chiefly upon its extent and its situation. The spade of the explorer thrust into these mounds, will settle perhaps one day a controversy in which, if a layman's

opinion may be ventured, neither party gains as yet a decided advantage. Gennesaret is cultivated, but it can hardly be said to be inhabited, saving the presence of the wretched little village of Medgel. What strange spell of loneliness and of silence has fallen upon these shores? At the edge of the plain and not far from the lake a copious spring, called Ain et Tin, the



THE CAMP ON THE SHORE OF GALILEE.

Fountain of the Fig Tree, gushes forth, and a little north of it are the ruins of the Khan Minyeh, built for the convenience of travelers seven hundred years ago.

To Khan Minyeh the camp had followed us, and there the little voyage ended, and we unladed a fragrant freight of branches of pink flowering oleander gathered in the thickets through which the Jordan flows into the lake, recalling with lively pleasure the opening stanzas of Keble's "Third Sunday in Advent:"

“ What went ye out to see
O'er the rude, sandy lea,
Where stately Jordan flows by many a palm,
Or where Gennesaret's wave
Delights the flowers to lave,
That o'er her western slope breathe airs of balm.

All through the summer night,
Those blossoms red and bright,
Spread their soft breasts, unheeding to the breeze,
Like hermits watching still
Around the sacred hill,
Where erst our Saviour watched upon his knees.



THE PLAIN OF GENNESARET.

The plain of Gennesaret is terminated on the north by a bold, rocky headland, projecting into the lake and showing traces of the conduit by which once water was conveyed across the height. From this vantage point one could look down the lake almost to its outlet, and read of the Galilean ministry with the scenes in which it was transacted spread out before the eye. Somewhere upon these curving shores below was the city in which the mother of Jesus and his brothers and sisters leaving Nazareth came to

dwelt, and the house about whose door multitudes thronged as the Sabbath was drawing to its close waiting for the coming forth of the Prophet whose touch, whose word (2d verse) had power to heal, and the synagogue where he taught. This beach was his familiar walk and over these waters he sailed to that mysterious eastern shore where the hungry multitudes were fed, and where, when night had fallen, he went apart alone to pray. Setting aside disputes about this locality and that here was a frame in which the gospel pictures took on a new and livelier meaning, here was a "fifth gospel" which one read devoutly, his heart overflowing with quiet joy. It is a memory which cannot fade when the pages read that day are opened; now one sees very clearly printed upon them the picture of the shining blue oval of the little land-locked sea and the soft rounded blue hills which shut it in.

The day had begun with a storm, quickly followed by clearing weather. In the late afternoon clouds gathered again and little showers came creeping over the shoulder of the hill to break in gentle dashes of warm rain. Down the lake they swept darkening the surface of the water and closely pursued by sunshine to vanish in the clear blue of the eastern horizon. As the sun sunk lower a blacker and more threatening cloud loomed up, driving the watcher in his height to the shelter of a rock. When it had spent its brief fury and rolled on, against its dark background a brilliant rainbow suddenly shone out and lingered long, and faded only with the setting of the sun. What emblem could be more fitting of the radiant charm which for the Christian believer must always invest these lonely and silent shores!